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CHRISTIAN CHARACTER

BY

R. W. CHURCH

DEAN OF ST. PAUL'S

HONORARY FELLOW OF ORIEL COLLEGE

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TO
LORD BLACHFORD
IN REMEMBRANCE OF A LONG FRIENDSHIP
THIS VOLUME IS INSCRIBED.

THE following Sermons were preached at the Sunday afternoon services at St. Paul's during the month of August 1885. The month of August is one of those in which Dr. Liddon usually preaches: but this year he was prevented by illness from keeping his ordinary residence, and it became my duty to supply his place.

September 1885.

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I.

ABRAHAM.

“Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus.”
—PHIL. ii. 5.

18 THE special instance of the “mind” of Christ Jesus, which the Apostle speaks of in this place is, as you will remember, His voluntary humiliation for our sakes, out of love for us —His Incarnation and His Passion. That was, indeed, the supreme disclosure of His “mind ;” its unexampled and unapproachable manifestation. But “the mind of Christ” is here set before Christians as the standard for their own life, and that, not only in its critical and urgent trials, but in the everyday details of feeling and behaviour. The

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“mind of Christ Jesus” which led Him to Bethlehem and Calvary was not something related simply and separately to one particular occasion. It means all that makes Him what He is, now and for ever, in love, in goodness, in perfection—in what He wills, in what He approves—in what He does. The “mind of Christ Jesus” answers in that ineffable and transcendent personality, Divine at once and human, to what we understand in men by the word “character.” The “mind of Christ Jesus,” as understood by us, as something to be copied and realised by men, is the same thing as what we mean when we speak of the Christian character and temper, in all its fulness, and variety, and beauty, and strength.

The Christian character is set before us in manifold and diversified ways in the Bible. The Christian character in its completeness is the result and outgrowth of all that series

of events of which the Bible is in part, but in the most important part, the record ; which begins in ages back beyond our ken, and which comes down even to the day which is passing. The Bible exhibits it in various stages, in various forms—not always perfect, yet always going on to what is higher and purer, and shown to us at last, after the passage of so many ages and generations, so many efforts and failures and slow steps of progress, in its finished and flawless perfectness, in the Person of the Divine Son of Man. It embraces many elements, it assumes many different, sometimes even contrary, appearances—different and contrary as the fruit is from the flower, and the flower from the root leaves which first shoot from the seed, and the harshness of the unripe fruit from the bloom and sweetness of the same fruit ripened. But it has a moral basis which is the same

through all its forms ; it has characteristics which belong to it in all its stages ; its stages and forms are connected one with another in natural and easy gradation ; it is a substantial and definite and real thing by itself, which has affected and still affects the state and history of man, just as national character, or the philosophic habit and temper, are real and substantial and operative things. This form of human character, tending from the first to the "mind of Christ," and at last culminating in it in His person, and, less completely, in His saints after the Day of Pentecost, is the character put before us in the Bible, and given us to study, to learn from, and, according to our measure, to assimilate and reproduce.

It is obvious at once, as I have said, that its forms, as shown in the Bible, are very various. The life of Jesus Christ is the key of all these forms, the interpreter, the reconciler of

their differences, the corrector of their imperfections ; and with that key we see the moral unity that runs through the life of faith and obedience from the beginning. But that key was not given till the fulness of time came, and the slow and painful steps of necessary waiting were gone through. But in the Bible we see them made ; we follow, through outward and apparent changes, the inward growth of what was to issue in the Christian character. I have ventured to think that it might be interesting to try and follow this growth as set before us in the Bible. I have to supply the place during this month of one whose familiar voice every one in this place so greatly misses, and whose absence, and its temporary cause, every one so deeply regrets. I shall attempt—it can only be in the rudest outline—to follow the unfolding of what I have called the Christian character ; the true religious character ; what

Scripture calls the "mind of Christ," more or less realised in men :—to point out how its various essential elements, each in its due time and occasion, made their appearance and gained consistency and health and began to discharge their functions, till all were combined in harmony, according to the pattern intended from the beginning, "the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ." We do not, of course, expect to find in the earlier what we find in the later forms of character. We should be surprised to find in Abraham what is natural in word and thought in Isaiah ; in Isaiah what is natural in St. Paul ; in the age of the Kings or the Captivity what belongs to the age of the Apostles. But it is no anachronism in us who believe in Christ the Everlasting Word, and in that Divine Spirit "Who spake by the prophets," to claim for the Christian character, of course in early and

rudimentary, yet real, forms, all that was religious in Abraham, or Moses, or David ; for all that was good in them came from Christ their Lord ; and with all their incompleteness, here were the true beginnings of what led on to what was completed in Christ—of what, when they should be made perfect, would be developed and completed after His image, in them, as in the rest of His saints. We may claim the religious discipline of patriarch, and lawgiver, and prophet, as a contribution, in its own time and stage, to the ultimate formation of the Christian character. We may claim the character thus formed in them as a necessary step and indispensable element for that more perfect whole which should be realised on earth when the fulness of time came.

The survey of this great preparation of human character for the height and perfection which Christ came to give it must

necessarily be a very rapid and superficial one. But there seem to be in the Bible record of God's discipline marked and leading moments or epochs, when that discipline was exercised in a special way, with special purpose and special results. It was one thing to the Patriarchs. It was another thing in the days of the Law. It was yet another with the Psalmists and Prophets. Each time some great and essential element necessary for ever to the health, and soundness, and strength of the religious or Christian character, was developed and confirmed, and made a permanent addition to that growing body of goodness and holiness and truth, which the second Adam was at last to make perfect. Very slow was the process of growth; interrupted and thrown back by the sins of men; seeming at times to fail and stop. But the ground gained was never lost: the light and the knowledge and the

hope once given were kept through the worst times, till the hour arrived for the Master to acknowledge and crown the work which He had so patiently watched over.

I will confine myself to-day to what seems to me to have been the special lesson, the special religious acquisition of Patriarchal times ; the special contribution of that stage of God's discipline to the formation of the religious character which was to be at last "the mind of Christ."

The foundation of the religious character of the Old and New Testaments was laid in a great idea which is brought into clear and strong distinctness in the age of the Patriarchs, in God's dealings with Abraham, in what is shown to us of the discipline and guidance under which he became the "Father of the faithful," the first example,—in detail, I mean, of feeling and action,—of the religious life. And that idea is the singleness and

individuality of the soul in its relation to the God who called it into being.

The singleness, the solitariness of the human soul, compared with all other things in the world about it; its independence, and its greatness. This is to us the most elementary of commonplaces. It has become part of the first axioms and presuppositions in our received conceptions of religion; we cannot imagine religion without assuming it. But this great idea was not always as distinct and natural as it has come to be to us. It was once confused, imperfect, obscure. In the early days of the world it seemed much more natural to look upon men, not singly, but in great groups, or kindreds, or tribes. The individual, in his place on earth and his passage through life, was regarded as a part of a whole to which he belonged, for weal or woe, for preservation or destruction. His separate existence was of small account:

the limb takes its importance from the body, the branch from the tree. "When we examine the ancient mind all the world over," writes Dr. Mozley, "one very remarkable want is apparent in it—viz., a true idea of the individuality of man; an adequate conception of him as an independent person, a substantial being in himself, whose life and existence was his own."¹ "Society," says another writer,² "in primitive times was not what it is assumed to be at present, a collection of individuals. In fact, and in view of the men who composed it, it was an aggregation of families." . . . "One peculiarity always distinguished the infancy of society. Men are regarded and treated, not as individuals, but always as members of a particular group. . . . The family relation was the narrowest and most personal rela-

¹ J. B. Mozley's *Ruling Ideas*, p. 37.

² Maine's *Ancient Law*, pp. 126, 183.

tion in which a man stood ; nor, paradoxical as it may seem, was he ever regarded as himself, as a distinct individual. His individuality was swallowed up in his family." Strange as this often seems to us, it was not strange once ; nor is it so unnatural as it seems now. The first outlook on the world is not one to enforce the importance of the individual. We see in it vast masses of men, streaming, drifting, like huge clouds, across the scene of time, and answering to the vast aggregates of inanimate nature—to the leaves which make up the foliage of the forest, to the blades of grass which cover the face of the pastures, to the raindrops in which the storm comes down for miles over the lands, the particles of water which fill the sea, the grains of sand which build up its shores. These great masses of human society remain, while certainly the individual, even the greatest, soon goes where he is no

more seen. The poet watches with melancholy perplexity the continuity and permanence of nature. "The form remains, the function never dies," of the running water :—

"Still glides the stream, and shall not cease to
glide . . .

While we, the brave, the mighty, and the wise,
We men, . . . must vanish." ¹

That is the first, and that is still one real aspect of human life. We, each of us, one by one, are lost in the innumerable crowd of our fellow-men. Half our thoughts are still of man in the aggregate: the nation, the city, the public, the class, the interest. We cannot break through the natural limitations of the human imagination. In half our thoughts we ignore the man in the function—he is to us the servant, the workman, the soldier, the office-bearer: . of

¹ Wordsworth, *River Duddon Sonnets*: "*Afterthought.*" Contrast Leopardi's terrible lines, *La Ginestra*, The broom *plant* of Vesuvius.

the man, the soul, the character, his joys, his sins, his hopes, we know nothing. Of the numbers who perish in a great battle, or are swept away in daily crowds by a great epidemic, how little do we think of each separate person, his separate history, and character, and sufferings, all the long process each has gone through since he was a little child, to the last fatal moment when he passed with so many others from life. No wonder the instinctive self-deceit still often comes into men's minds, against which the son of Sirach warns us—"say not thou, I will hide myself from the Lord. . . . I shall not be remembered among so many people: for what is my soul among such an infinite number of creatures."¹

If that feeling, of the individual being merged and swallowed up in the aggregate, is strong and even irresistible at times now,

¹ *Eccclus.* 16, 17.

how much more so in the infancy of the world, when that discipline of man began which was to lead at last to the "mind of Christ!" And so the first work of that discipline was to enforce and impress deeply another great and paramount aspect of man and life, another great side of the truth which should balance, correct, and complete the other. It was to teach and leave firmly planted the faith that God had His eye on each separate unit in these innumerable crowds: that each separate soul in them had its direct relations to its Maker; its course to follow for itself, its destiny to fulfil or to fail in, its special calls and gifts according to its Master's purpose to account for, its own separate hopes, its own separate responsibilities. In the history of Abraham, from his call to the last trial of his faith, we see that great, and as far as we are allowed to see, at least in its greatness and depth, that new lesson. Separated

from his kindred and father's house, he goes forth alone into the unknown world, with only the God of heaven and earth for his guide and friend. And so he meets God on the hill-tops of Canaan, or in the solitudes of the desert, not as the local deity, not as the God of tribe or family—that worship of “other gods” was left behind “on the other side of the flood,”—but as the Everlasting, and the Alone, and the Unnamed, calling into His presence the soul that He has made ; placing Himself in immediate relation with it as if it, too, was alone in existence ; appointing the purpose which it was to fulfil, and the promise and blessing offered to its hope. Singly and alone God speaks to him, not to his people or his family or his father's house. Singly and alone, he is called forth from all these, “to go out not knowing whither he went :” singly and alone, he is proved and tried and owned

and blessed ; singly and alone, with him, not with a tribe or a nation—this was to be, but not now—God makes the covenant which contains the hopes of the world ; singly and alone, he builds the altars where he meets with God and calls on His name. Alone, he is brought near in the awful vision, and hears the awful appeal to his faith, “Fear not, Abraham, I am thy shield and thy exceeding great reward ;” alone in all the world he answers it,—“he believed the Lord, and it was counted to him for righteousness ;” alone, he stands “abroad,” beneath the stars, and sees in them the figure of the souls which shall be given him as his seed ; alone, the “deep sleep,” and “the horror of great darkness falls upon him,” and he sees and hears the confirmation of the promise, as “when the sun went down, the smoking furnace and the burning lamp passed between the divided pieces” of the sacrifice.

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Alone he meets the great trial of his faith—"I am the Almighty God ; walk thou before Me and be thou perfect," the words which introduced the promise of a son ; and then the words which asked the surrender of the precious gift, "Take now thy son, thine only son, Isaac, whom thou lovest," and offer him up for a burnt offering ; alone, he receives him back again, as from the dead, and with him the great concluding blessing of his life, "By Myself have I sworn, saith the Lord, for because thou hast done this thing, and hast not withheld thy son, thine only son ; that in blessing I will bless thee and multiplying I will multiply thee, as the stars of the heaven, and the sand on the sea-shore : . . . and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed."

Here at the beginning of the history of religion in the Bible, a history in which men were to be so variously dealt with,

as corporate societies as well as individual persons—here, in its front and on its threshold, is the type and figure of the religious man. Abraham was to be the example to us all—the great instance of that faith without which there can be no communion between man and his God, the faith which realises God, and what God is. Abraham stands before us, in the Old Testament and the New, as “the friend of God.” Abraham stands before us, equally in both, as the “father of us all.” Of him is spoken by the mouth of Jesus Christ that mysterious grace, or that mysterious praise—“Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw it, and was glad.” And his history is marked as the history of a man, a soul, by itself in relation to Almighty God; not as one of a company, a favoured brotherhood, or chosen body, but in all his doings single and alone, alone with the Alone, one with

One, with his Maker, as he was born, and as he dies, alone : the individual soul, standing all by itself, in the presence of its Author and Sustainer, called by Him and answering to His call, choosing, acting, obeying, from the last depths and secrets of its being ; feeling, confessing His awful and unsearchable righteousness :—" Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right !" feeling, confessing its own nothingness before Him, and yet trusting His goodness to let it speak its prayer : " Behold now, I have taken upon me to speak unto the Lord, which am but dust and ashes. . . . Oh let not my Lord be angry, and I will speak yet but this once." " The Lord," it is said, " left *communing* with Abraham."

Thus early was laid the foundation of the religious character, the character which was to grow up into " the mind of Christ." In our mysterious being we have a double ex-

istence: we are part of a body, and God deals with men collectively as communities; yet also we are as much single spirits as if we were alone in the world, each running separately and apart its individual course. To teach men from the first the awful, the difficult truth, that they have each of them a soul—this was the meaning of that discipline of Abraham and the Patriarchs; and the whole history of religion has shown how necessary it was. The visible world is all about us, early and late, wrapping us round, occupying eye and thought and desire; we seem to belong to it, and to it alone; it seems as if we must take our chance with it. And, on the other hand, we know how easily men come to think that being one of a body—even though it were the “seed of Abraham,” or “the Church of Christ”—makes it less necessary to remember their personal singleness, their personal responsibility. To be-

long to a "good set," to a religious family, seems to give us a security for ourselves ; insensibly, perhaps, we take to ourselves credit for the goodness of our friends, we look at ourselves as if we must be what they are. The soul has indeed to think and to work with others and for others, and for great aims and purposes, out of and beyond itself. *For* others, and *with* others, the best part of its earthly work is done. But, first, the soul has to know that "sublime" truth about itself ; that it stands before the Everlasting, by itself, and for what it is. Abraham learned it, like Moses, like Elijah, like Isaiah, like St. Paul ; in Job and the Psalter we see the early fruits of that discipline. The soul knew itself alone with God ; no words could tell the incommunicable secret of the presence of God ; and in that secret was wrapped up the seed of its conviction of its own mysterious immortality—"God is not the God of the

dead, but of the living." This is the first lesson of the masters of the spiritual life. This is the first opening of the eyes to the reality of religion, when it comes upon us in our heart of hearts, in the deep certainties of conscience, that in spite of all that fills the eye and is *not* ourselves, there *is* ourself, and there *is* God ; and "we begin by degrees, as it has been said, to perceive that there are but two beings in the whole universe—two only supreme and luminously self-evident beings—our own soul, and the God who made it."¹

How shall we learn this lesson? How shall we come to that true sense of the individuality of the soul, which recognises and takes account, at once of its nothingness and its greatness—its nothingness in the immensity of the universe, and, still more, in the presence of the living God, infinite and all

¹ J. H. Newman, Sermons, i. 2, p. 23. Cf. *Apologia*, p. 59.

holy—its greatness, because He, even He, made it: it is the work of His hands, endowed with gifts from His own excellences, made that it might live and be perfect: and to it is given His care, His love; it is valued, trusted, blessed by Him. “The universe can crush me, like the weakest reed,” said the great and devout thinker;¹ “but this reed has thought, and will, and conscience, and so is infinitely greater than that which crushed it.” How shall we learn thus to feel what it is to be alone with our Maker, God? There is one time in men’s lives when all must feel it, either for themselves or for their friends: when you watch the hours of the departing, you know that they must be feeling that then, at last, they are by themselves with God. They must die alone, and we like them; we must all be alone then. But in truth we live alone as

¹ Pascal.

much as we die alone : and we, "whose spirits live in awful singleness, each in his self-formed sphere of light or gloom,"¹ need to know that great conviction before we die. We want it in life, to elevate, to consecrate, to purify life : to give it truth and nobleness, to raise it to its real power and hope. It is on our knees, amid the silences of reflection and meditation and prayer, that we must seek that overpowering and thrilling conviction. It may, indeed, come at any moment ; in the hurry of business, in the hour of joy, in the misery of bereavement, in the flash and revelation of the beauty or the awfulness of the world ; ah ! even in the very moment of temptation, and the hour of sin, we may learn and feel the startling and essential singleness of the soul. But it will be well for us not to wait for its coming, but to seek it—to seek it, as the Psalmist long

¹ *Lyra Apostolica, Corcyra.*

ago taught men to seek it :—" O God, Thou art my God, early will I seek Thee." " O my soul, thou hast said unto the Lord, Thou art my God, my goods are nothing unto Thee." " O Lord, Thou hast searched me out and known me ; Thou knowest my down-sitting and mine up-rising ; thou understandest my thoughts long before." " For though the Lord be high, yet hath He respect unto the lowly. . . . Yea, Thy mercy, O Lord, endureth for ever ; despise not then the works of Thine own hands." " Whom have I in heaven but Thee ; and there is none upon earth that I desire in comparison of Thee. My flesh and my heart faileth ; but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever."

II.

THE MORAL LAW.

"Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus."

—PHIL. ii. 5.

"What advantage then hath the Jew? . . . Much every way: chiefly, because to them were committed the oracles of God."—ROM. iii. 1, 2.

THE history of the Bible shows the growth and development of a special religious character, which through many stages and trials was ultimately to become one which had "the mind of Christ" for its standard and model. The foundation of it was laid in the recognition of individual responsibility, the individual relation of the soul to God, its Maker and its Judge. The example of Abraham, the "Friend of God,"—with his keen and high sense of this awful relation, his

faith, his heroic nobleness, his freeness and largeness of spirit, the soundness and loyalty of his heart under extremest trial, his solitariness and detachment, "a stranger and sojourner in the land,"—was the stock on which all that was good and excellent in the religious character of his successors was to grow, the type to which it was to conform itself. "Look," it was said, "look unto the rock whence ye are hewn, and to the hole of the pit whence ye are digged. Look unto Abraham your father, and unto Sarah that bare you ; for I called him alone, and blessed him, and increased him."—Is. li. 1, 2.

This special religious character, a thing different from anything else in the world, was to be nurtured and gradually unfolded in a select nation, chosen for this purpose, whose fortunes were directed with a view to this end, and whose institutions, social, political, and religious, were appointed to be,

as it were, its cradle and seed plot. With righteous Abraham, the great example of what God approved, the nation was bound by the closest ties, as his children and family; and the orders of the commonwealth of Israel were made with the intention that the heirs of the great promise should never lose sight of its origin and its conditions. The Hebrew nation was to be the guardian of that character which Abraham *was*, as it was to be also the guardian and perpetuator of the great hopes which Abraham *had*. That character, as it was seen in the Hebrew race, was still in the rudeness and harshness and incompleteness of its immature beginnings. The formation of that strange and complex thing, the traditional and fixed character of a people—so vague and indeterminate in detail, so certain and visible on a large scale—is not the work of a few years or some single influence. It is

the work of time, the combined result of many lives and many circumstances and events, through many generations. But from the first the people of Israel were told of their calling. From the first they were told what they existed for, what their existence pointed to. From the first, in all their superstition, and ignorance, and barbarous perverseness, they were told again and again, "Ye shall be unto Me a kingdom of priests, and a holy nation"—"Ye shall be holy, for I am holy." *That*, in what it meant in the mouth of Apostles after Pentecost, who adopt the words, was what their history was to lead to. The religious character, indeed, as they could understand it, was but inchoate and imperfect. But it had, however crudely, the lineaments and outlines of that which was to last and to grow throughout the ages, till it was made perfect in Jesus Christ.

The early history of Israel is marked by .

three great features—a great redemption and deliverance ; the transformation of its families and tribes into a nation and a State, a communion and fellowship, not merely by blood, but by a common government and common institutions ; and, lastly, a strict and definite law. That isolation of the individual soul, which for great religious purposes was enforced on Abraham, was now corrected and compensated, for equally great religious purposes, by a discipline which made all Israel feel one, one in kindred, one in worship, one in hope, one in all that could bind brother to brother, in all the necessities and all the blessings of life. But the great governing fact of this period was the fact of the law. It was, that after the deliverance from Egypt, and the constitution of the tribes as a separate people, they were placed under the yoke of a law and the bond of a covenant. The presence, the prominence,

the exacting and all-pervading supremacy of law, moral law, religious law, ceremonial law, political and social law, law definite, strict, severe, unbending, distinguishes the last four books of the Pentateuch. How severe, how distasteful this discipline was, how difficult to submit to and to enforce, they also show us. But to impress on Israel, however reluctant, the idea and the reality of law, was the intention of all this early stage of their history, and it was impressed, never to be forgotten, never to this day to loosen its hold on their minds.

Here, then, it seems to me, is the second great stage, in that training of men which the Bible set before us, in the formation of the religious character, which was ultimately to issue in the "mind and likeness" of Christ. Very different and unlike, at this stage of the development, to what was to come of it; yet an essential preliminary and

preparatory step. It was the planting—nay, the burning into the religious mind—of the supremacy of duty and the moral law, and the obligation of obedience to its Lord and Giver. Here, at the outset of this great school of character which we know as the history of Israel, of Judaism, stands as its first great lesson the Decalogue and its applications. There was much besides that was imposed and commanded ; much besides to which was given the name of law ; much which carried with it deep significance, and grave warnings, and vast hopes ; which spoke of sin, and forgiveness, and judgment, and mysterious expiation. But between all this, important and full of influence as it was—between this and the law of the Ten Commandments, there is the interval that lies between the moral law and every other obligation and interest of a moral being—"I will have mercy and not sacrifice." First

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and foremost in that dispensation, which is so filled with the notion of command and law that we give it emphatically and distinctively the name of *the Law*; first and foremost, as its foundation-stone and groundwork, stands a strong, clear, moral rule, the unchangeable law proclaimed on Mount Sinai: those "living oracles," as St. Stephen calls them, which the Great Lawgiver received at his Master's hand, and in which, after all the changes of thousands of years, the heart of man still hears the voice of God.

"Thou leddest Thy people like sheep by the hand of Moses and Aaron." The Priesthood, the characteristic ceremonial law, was in its own time of the most eventful consequence. It taught, it prophesied, it warned. But it served for its time, and was not meant to last. What was of permanent significance in Judaism was the paramount place of the moral law. Aaron

the Priest was great, but Moses the Lawgiver was greater. By placing the Ten Commandments on its forefront, it made good its claim to be an "everlasting covenant;" it taught and laid down the moral conditions of religious character, not only for its own time, but for all time. It was a step in religious history of which we can even now but imperfectly measure the greatness. Think of what the world was then, what it had been, what it was to be long afterwards. We know something of it in its vast conquering and devastating empires, Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Persia—we dimly guess outside of them, in the east, and north, and south, in the boundless "wilderness of the nations" ranging beyond our ken. No one can look on the scene without feeling almost giddy as he contemplates the shifting appearances not only of all things religious, but all things moral. It is like the sickening

aspect of a wild, confused waste of waters, where nothing keeps its shape for an instant, but passes into another ; where all whirls about and eddies in hopeless entanglement of form and substance. You seem to see nature running wild—dazzled, bewildered, maddened by the senses and its own ignorance. You see the most fantastic imaginations, the most extravagant caprice, the most savage and insatiate passion, the most monstrous instincts ; the enormous play on a terrific scale of fierce pride and the madness of boundless conquest and absolute power ; and you ask, What really is the rule by which to judge all this ? Is it all only natural ? Has it all an equal claim to assert itself ? Are the most hateful and repulsive forms of blood and impurity only hateful because we are not accustomed to them—on a level with the phenomena of nature, neither more nor less blameworthy ?

There is the sense of Divine power ; there is the recognition of right and wrong, of ought and ought not, of duty of some kind ; but of *what* kind ? of *what* restraint ? of *what* service, either to God or man ? And the moment you ask, the ideas seem to disappear, swept away, dissolved, lost in the clouds and storms of contradiction and confusion. Into this lawless world of tumult and self-will, tyrannous in its blindness, its hatred, its cruelty, its greed, the people of Israel were launched to begin their wonderful and perilous course. They had but too much affinity, too much sympathy, with all the evil that was round them. But there was that among them which was nowhere else. At the head of their march through time and change, like the pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night, stood, fixed and stable and immovable amid all that was mutable and fluctuating, the moral

law. Elsewhere, in other legislation, in other institutions, more or less partially, the moral law disclosed itself; but here it was the very condition of the existence of a nation, the reason which gave meaning to its being. It might be disobeyed, but it was acknowledged as the tie between God and men, divine in its source, sovereign in its authority. Judaism was a *religion*, and not only a polity, and embodied a definite religious character, preserved it, continued it, unfolded it, not only in the written letter, but in fact and life. And in moulding the religious character at this stage of it, the law in its elevation as the *moral* law, in its stern and absolute control, as *law*—was the stamp and energetic agency.

This, then, as we follow the account given in the Bible of the progress of the religious character, seems the special feature of what, speaking roughly, may be viewed as its

second period. It was the presence, the prominence, the visible action of strong and pervading law, and that a law which incorporated the *moral* law as its supreme and governing element. The soul, which in the history of the patriarchs had learned its relation to God, had now to go through the severer discipline of learning to live according to His will, with an intelligent and serious sense of *what* and how *great* the task was. It needed a rule; it needed teaching how to regard and respect its rule, and how to use it. In the wild scene around of uncontrolled passions and clashing customs it wanted some fixed standard and beacon by which it could make sure of its ground and steady itself in the terrible disorder. And so the law was given. Amid the clouds and thunders of Sinai that beacon was set up, a standard of right and wrong, of what men ought and ought not to do

and to wish, which the heart of man felt to be as fixed and sure as the solid earth and the unchanging heavens. The law came in—as St. Paul says, “because of transgressions”—to tame the wandering self-will of nature, to fix the great points and limits within which the soul must bound itself, if it would not lose itself in moral anarchy and ruin. It came in to teach men not only to fear God, but—a much more difficult lesson—to obey Him ; to obey as the moral duty of a dependent creature ; to obey as the only key to confidence, and light, and trustful hope in a being who looks to God as his Father and Ruler. It came in to teach men to obey, that they might learn to rule themselves ; to be trusted with their own fate ; to be, each in his own place and order, lord and king over himself. It came in to impress more solemnly and deeply, on the generations which were to be,

the fact of sin ; to remind men, self-forgetful and self-complacent as they easily come to be, of their continual shortcomings, and of what God thinks of them, to open men's eyes to the weakness of their moral efforts. And the law, with its peremptoriness, its rigour, had yet another office. There is no strange self-deceit more deeply and obstinately fixed in men's hearts than this : that those whom God favours may take liberties that others may not ; that religious men may venture more safely to transgress than others ; that good men may allow themselves to do wrong things. There is no more certain fact in the range of human experience than that with strong and earnest religious feeling there may be a feeble and imperfect hold on the moral law, often a very loose sense of justice, truth, purity. The law, as it was held up in its strictness over the children of Abraham, the inheritors of his

stupendous promises, the redeemed from the might of Pharaoh, reminded them at the outset of their history, what they found it so hard to realise, that the Lord of Jew and Gentile is no respecter of persons—that “He hath given unto no man license to sin :” that no man has His sanction “to do evil that good may come.”

Here, as regards its office in preparing for the true Christian character, in furnishing an elementary yet indispensable portion to it, was the service rendered in its time by the law. We know that it could not, was not meant to, make anything perfect ; either the knowledge of God, or the moral standard, or the religious character. Its history, indeed, in its most prominent aspect, is the history of a great failure ; it is the history of a long series of struggles against truth and goodness, the record of a great and apparently unsuccessful moral conflict, a great and awful

tragedy, in which the fifth act closes with the perishing of the righteous. Often throughout it, and at the best, men see what is better and approve it, and then follow what is worse. Often we see the will to do good is present ; but how to perform what they would do, men find not. Its history is full, as all history is full, of strange perversions of right, of unaccountable anomalies which now surprise and perplex us, to which we have lost the key. And over and above this, from first to last, in the people as a whole, there is the continual spectacle of resistance and disobedience, undisguised, incorrigible. The weakness of the law is conspicuous ; and yet it was the law which the Psalmist loved so dearly, and which the Prophets interpreted and illuminated. And in the influence which it *did* exert on the religious character it seemed to narrow and to harden. In the Jewish

character, as it came out after centuries of the law, there is that harsh and unhopeful feature to which we give the name of legality ; the slavery to law, the idolatry of law, the pride in law, the bondage to the letter ; obstinate, unsympathetic, contemptuous at once and fearful, of everything in the free outside world. But what the law was to do, and what it did, was this—it impressed upon the people of Israel, upon the Christian Church, and ultimately on the human mind for all time, that the indispensable foundation of the religious character was the “honest and good heart,” obedient, and sincere in its obedience, according to its light, to the moral law, for its own sake, and the sake of Him who gave it. It impressed on them and on the world what was then a new lesson—the inseparable connection of true religion with the highest human morality, justice, truth, self-

restraint and self-command, mercy. How fruitful this great step was, and how necessary, the whole history which followed showed.

The open conflict in the world between good and evil is an anxious and often doubtful one. But if that which is on the side of good and truth be faithless and disloyal, the odds are indeed heavy on the side of evil. And the law not only confronts and rebukes the sinner ; it also warns the righteous. It is not only a standing witness against public and manifest wickedness. It not only lifts its awful voice when we are, perhaps ruthlessly, made not only to *know* but to *imagine* those hideous and unmanageable forms of portentous guilt which lurk in the midst of our civilisation and our religion, those depths of Satan which men can hardly look down into without that deadly fascination which may

cost them their souls. But it has a further office. It was given to make us feel and to restrain that moral unsoundness of the conscience and the will which men may keep secret, "each one in the deep of his heart," while wishing to serve God, believing that he serves Him. Decisively and for good it was laid down that if a man was to be the servant of God, righteous in His sight, a religious man in the true sense of the word, his serious rule and standard must be the moral law, the law that bound the soul, without trifling and without evasion, to duty, to goodness, to God its Source and Judge. To us this essential interdependence of the religious character and the moral law is a commonplace: it is not less one of the greatest truths that man has to learn, and one of the most difficult of his lessons—one that over and over again he has shown himself most ingenious in evading. The

kindling and absorbing earnestness, which has given itself with ardour to some high religious object, is not safe, wants its only solid and trustworthy foundation, unless it has full in view, unforgotten and deeply revered, the great fixed law of moral right, ruling with no reserves over the inner and unseen life. No form of that earnestness can make sure of itself without the guarantee of sincere obedience and self-command in the certainties of duty. Whether in the elevations of worship, or in the joy of self-abandonment and sacrifice, or in the enterprises of an adventurous charity, or in the enthusiasm of a generous hope, or in the zeal which is ambitious in a great cause—truth, or purity, or conquests of souls for Christ—or in the devout quiet of a life that seeks the shade and that works in it—everywhere, beyond all these, the obligations of the law of right and wrong have to be

remembered and answered. Everywhere men have failed, and failed deeply, from forgetting them. All history is full of warnings: of great religious characters spoiled or distorted, of great religious efforts hopelessly marred and degenerate, because in the eagerness and confidence of a good intention the Ten Commandments were left on one side, or kept out of view, or it was taken for granted that of course they were obeyed, because people meant to do God service. And we must be blind if we do not still sometimes see among ourselves signs and instances of the same mistake.

At any rate, let us remember the lesson for ourselves. At any rate, in our own case, let us not fall into the deadly self-deceit, that because we are religious in wish, in feeling, we are dispensed from the obligations and restrictions which we see bind others; because we are, as we think, "good

people," because we have the feeling of being in the right way, because God, it may be, has greatly favoured us, we may venture on what conscience persists in warning us is unlawful, is wrong. Let us not think that because we frequent sacraments and delight in divine service, and feel devotion and uplifting of heart in prayer, we need not fear the temptations which are "common to man ;" that we can afford to indulge our dislike of trouble, or relax our care and vigilance, or neglect plain duties, or can be bold in things more dangerous still. Not the stern and rigorous Law only, but the New Testament puts this danger before us. It has some dreadful foreshadowings of self-deceit, dreaming of its innocence and exposed too late. Even good people like to do what their hearts prompt them to, and shut their eyes to the question of right or wrong ; and this is the answer that may one day

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meet them, when they ask whether they have not been devoted to the service and household of Christ—"I never knew you." Even good people are too ready with excuses to escape disagreeable duties; and one day they may be surprised at learning that the duty they avoided was to Christ Himself—"Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to Me." God grant us all the Psalmist's prayer, and to understand God's law in the Psalmist's spirit :—

"O let my heart be sound in Thy statutes : that I be not ashamed" (cxix. 80).

"I will run the way of Thy commandments : when Thou hast set my heart at liberty" (32).

"I see that all things come to an end : but Thy commandment is exceeding broad" (96).

"O ye that love the Lord, see that ye hate the thing that is evil. . . . Rejoice in the Lord, ye righteous : and give thanks for a remembrance of His holiness" (xcvii. 10, 12).

III.

THE PSALMS AND THE PROPHETS.

“Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus.”—PHIL. ii. 5.

“Teach me to do the thing that pleaseth Thee, for Thou art my God ; let Thy loving Spirit lead me forth into the land of righteousness.”—Ps. cxliii. 10.

THE foundations of the religious character, which was to be perfected in the “mind of Christ,” were laid in faith in God, and in the recognition of the supremacy of the moral law. Through ages and generations the Bible sets before us the slow growth, the unfolding and ripening of this character, till after long preparation and many steps, and still with many shortcomings, it became such that when Jesus Christ came it was

able to welcome Him, to recognise, however dimly, His hidden glory, to follow Him, and, from strength to strength and from grace to grace, to rise to something of His likeness. In Abraham we have seen the eyes of the soul opened to believe in God, to understand its own relation to Him. In the dispensation of Moses we have seen the discipline of the law, the acknowledgment of the paramount place of eternal moral truth. We go on from the religious character, as shown in the Patriarchs, and under Moses, to the religious character, in a more advanced and developed form, exhibited in the Psalms and the Prophets. A great step has been made ; for we are in the full burst of religious affections in the Psalms, of religious thought and reason in the Prophets. We see the religious character alive in every organ in the Psalms ; we see it speaking, teaching, soberly judging, earnestly warning

in the Prophets. Compared with what has been shown us so far, it is something new. It is a form in which we now trace not only actions and rules, not only the great rudimentary elements of faith and obedience and reliance on God, but feelings, desires, motives, reasonings. It is no longer a view from the outside. In the Psalms we see the soul in the secret of its workings, in the variety and play of its many-sided and subtly compounded nature—loving, hoping, fearing, despairing, exulting, repenting, aspiring—the soul, conscious of the greatness and sweetness of its relations to Almighty God, and penetrated by them to the very quick ; longing, thirsting, gasping, after the glimpses that visit it, of His goodness and beauty—awestruck before the unsearchableness of His judgment, silent before the certainty of His righteousness—opening, like a flower to the sun, in the presence of His

light, of the immensity of His loving-kindness. And not only the affections, but the faculties and functions of the reason, awaken and expand. In the Prophets, the mind and thought of man receive and reflect the truth and the purposes of God. More and more illuminated by Him, the soul looks with new eyes on the world, its disorders, its greatness, its future. "It considers the days of old and the years that are past;" it has caught the deep interest of human history, and sees in it the mystery of His Providence and government. In His name it passes judgment, it blesses, it condemns. With His promise, and under His leading, it dares, amid the darkness of sin and the present and visible power of evil, to go forward and see visions of a kingdom of righteousness. It recognises the sure signs which warrant its great hopes. It ventures to foretell the conquest of the untamed

Gentile world for God. And thus, to the discipline of outward precept and outward polity has been added the inner discipline of the awakened heart and intellect, quick to understand the Father's will, and to interpret its signs. "I will inform thee," is the promise, "and teach thee in the way wherein thou shalt go: I will guide thee with Mine eye."

This is the fact which meets us in the Bible. And surely there is nothing more wonderful in the religious history of our race than the interval between the Book of Judges and the Book of Psalms. In Judges we have the picture of a society lost in rebellion and apostasy, of a coarse and stiff-necked people, whom the law had not curbed even to an outward obedience, whom no deliverances could bring to a better mind. It closes in shame and desolation and blood, which Saul's troubled and disastrous kingdom

could not repair. That is the history ; and then we come to the Book of Psalms, not yet, of course, in its earliest portions, all that it was to be, but still, even in its earliest portions, marked with that special character which gained for the whole collection the name of the Psalms of David. In the Book of Psalms the religious affections are full grown : it was the highest expression of them which the world was to see. The profoundest religious thinkers have met there what they feel after. The highest saint cannot soar higher to the eternal throne of justice and love. And where were the foundations of this laid ? Where did they come from ? Songs of triumph, like those of Miriam and Deborah, prophecies like those of Balaam, lyrical retrospects like the " Song of Moses," thanksgivings like Hannah's, or laments like David's over Saul and Jonathan, even the mysterious Book of Job, we can

understand at that time. But in the Psalms the soul turns inward on itself, and their great feature is that they are the expression of a large spiritual experience. They come straight from "the heart within the heart," and the secret depths of the spirit. Where, in those rough, cruel days, did they come from, those piercing, lightning-like gleams of strange spiritual truth, those magnificent outlooks over the kingdom of God, those raptures at His presence and His glory, those wonderful disclosures of self-knowledge, those pure outpourings of the love of God? Surely here is something more than the mere working of the mind of man. Surely they tell of higher guiding, prepared for all time; surely, as we believe, they hear "the word behind them saying, This is the way, walk ye in it," they repeat the whispers of the Spirit of God, they reflect the very light of the Eternal Wisdom. In that wild time

there must have been men sheltered and hidden amid the tumult round them, humble and faithful and true, to whom the Holy Ghost could open by degrees the "wondrous things of His law," whom He taught, and whose mouths He opened, to teach their brethren by their own experience, and to do each their part in the great preparation. For "So is the kingdom of God : as if a man should cast seed into the ground, and should sleep and rise night and day, and the seed should spring and grow up, he knoweth not how, for the earth bringeth forth fruit of herself ; first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear." So has grown among mortal and sinful men, amid long delays and many disappointments, but with sure and wonderful advances, the "mind of Christ."

How do the Psalms exhibit the development of the religious character, from its

simpler to its more complete form? Out of a wide subject, let us take two points.

1. They bring before us in all its fulness and richness the devotional element of the religious character. They are the first great teachers and patterns of prayer, and they show this side of the religious character, not as hitherto in outline, but in varied and finished detail, in all its compass and living and spontaneous force. They disclose a religious character, as now, for instance, the Litany of our Prayer-book discloses a whole range of religious character. The Patriarchs and Moses, in the ancient days, "communed with God ;" but what thoughts, what desires, passed through the soul of the "Friend of God," abroad under the stars of heaven, of Isaac meditating in the field at eventide, of Moses amid the storms and the revelations of Sinai and the desert, we are not told, we are too far off to guess. And there is but

scanty record of actual prayer in the Mosaic ritual of sacrifice and offering. But here we have before us what devotion is, and what are the emotions and affections that feed it, and what is its natural language. Doubtless, what seems to us a sudden burst of the spirit of prayer was in reality the gradual growth of the long training of the Holy Ghost ; but so it is ; the Book of Psalms comes on us after the disappointing history of Israel, in a way which recalls the prophet's words—"The eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf be unstopped ; then shall the lame man leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb shall sing : for in the wilderness shall waters break out, and streams in the desert." Yes, in that "dreary waste of years," when the seed of Abraham seems sinking into a mere kingdom of this world, the waters of prayer and praise break forth, and "streams in the

desert." The tongue is loosed to give utterance out of the abundance of the heart, to every mood, every contrasted feeling of the changeful human mind. From all the hidden depths, from all the strange and secret consciousnesses of the awakened and enlightened soul, spring up unexpected and vivid words, in which generation after generation has found the counterpart of its own convictions and hopes and joys, its own fears and distresses and perplexities and doubts, its own confidence and its own sorrow, its own brightest and darkest hours.

2. This immense variety of mood and subject and occasion, with which the reverence and hope of worship are always combined, is a further point in the work of the Book of Psalms. It is a vast step in the revealing of man to man. We know how much we owe of the knowledge of ourselves to the great dramatists, to the

great lyrical poets, to the great novelists. Such, in the unfolding to man of all that is really and most deeply involved in the religious character, is the place of the Book of Psalms. It shows what, indeed, God is to the soul in all its many needs. The soul cannot be alone without God : the centre of attraction to all His creatures, "the Fountain and Loadstone of all love,"¹ high above the highest, yet humbling Himself to behold the things in heaven and earth ; mindful of the least, and feeding the young ravens when they cry unto Him, and opening His hand "to fill all things living with plenteousness;" in the "excellence of His mercy" shadowing beneath His wings the children of men—"They shall be satisfied with the plenteousness of Thy house : Thou shalt give them drink of Thy pleasures as out of the river ; for with Thee is the well of life, and

¹ Christina Rossetti, *Annus Domini*, 116.

in Thy light shall we see light." That is the God whom the soul owns as its Hope, and Refuge, and Guide, and Shepherd—"When my father and mother forsake me, the Lord taketh me up;" the "God of my life," the "God of my strength, the help of my countenance, and my God!" No other can so draw to Him the soul of man; and for Him, the "living God," the soul thirsts and longs:—"Like as the hart desireth the water brooks, so longeth my soul after Thee, O God. O how amiable are Thy tabernacles, Thou Lord of Hosts. O God, thou art my God, early will I seek Thee. My soul thirsteth for Thee, my flesh also longeth after Thee in a barren and dry land where no water is. Thus have I looked for Thee in holiness, that I might behold Thy power and glory; for Thy loving-kindness is better than the life itself." What a revelation to man of his deepest yearnings. But even

this might have misled him, if there had not been joined with it, in all its certainty, the profound and immovable belief in God's righteousness: "The Lord is righteous in all His ways, and holy in all His works:" "Thou art the God That hath no pleasure in wickedness: neither shall any evil dwell with Thee:" "If I incline unto wickedness in my heart the Lord will not hear me." This is the faith which dominates the whole Psalter; the soul recognising God's righteousness, as for Him and for itself the great reality of human life, which gives meaning and substance to its shadowy nothingness. It is sobered and solemnised as it looks abroad on the world, sees that righteousness set at nought by the pride and blindness of man, sees the insolence of the cruel and the oppression of the poor and needy, sees all the shadows of human power and human life passing away, yet is able to

“tarry the Lord’s leisure,” can say to itself, “Fret not thyself because of the ungodly,” knows that God is listening—“Thou hast heard the desire of the poor, Thou preparest their heart, and Thine ear hearkeneth thereto:” can see through the mists and delusions of the present, the coming of the God of judgment:—“Thou art of more honour and might than the hills of the robbers. The proud are robbed, they have slept their sleep; and all the men whose hands were mighty have found nothing. Yea, even as a dream when one awaketh; so shalt Thou make their image to vanish out of the city.” And with this has come in the soul itself the stirring and enlightening of conscience. In the Psalms we see how it has learned to look into itself, how it has learned the need of the inward watch, the inward struggle, the inward self-disclosure—“Examine me, O Lord, and prove me; try

out my reins and my heart :” “Commune with your own heart, and in your chamber, and be still”—how it has seen the awful vision of its own sin, how it has discovered how deeply it needs mercy and forgiveness and healing, and the spirit from God to help it in the right path which, with all its sins, it longs to tread—“Who can tell how oft he offendeth ; O cleanse Thou me from secret faults ;” “My sins are more in number than the hairs of my head ;” “Have mercy upon me according to Thy great goodness ; make me a clean heart ; take not Thy Holy Spirit from me ;” “The sacrifice of God is a troubled spirit ; a broken and contrite heart Thou wilt not despise.” Here we first hear these familiar words—words so familiar to countless generations since : and what a profound and original lesson, what a step is here made in the contact of the human mind with the realities of its state. But if the

Psalms have taught us the language of penitence, if they even give a merciful sanction to the bursts of fear or desolation which the weakness of human nature cannot always restrain, if they can recognise as dread passages in human experience the "palpable oppressions of despair," what ever equalled, before the days of Pentecost, the freedom, the joy of their worship? Who could have imagined such varied, such abounding exultation at the glories, the bounty, the loving-kindness, the hopes of God? When does it ever seem to tire and flag—the rush, the sweep of that flood of gladness, that in spite of all interruptions of distress and fear, pours through the Book of Psalms, filling our earthly days with glory and hope, and making us feel that, short and few as they are, vain and incomplete as they seem, *that* can be no poor and worthless a life which man passes under the "shadow of

the wings of God ;" sheltered and guided by Him Whose " righteousness is like the strong mountains, and His judgment like the great deep." " Who rewardeth every man according to his work." " Whom have I in heaven but Thee, and there is none upon earth that I desire in comparison of Thee. My flesh and my heart faileth ; but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever."

In the Psalms we see the growing up in the religious character of these high gifts of the Spirit of God—devotion, worship, self-knowledge. In the vast and diversified domain of Prophecy we see other elements of that character gradually appearing, and under God's guiding and the lessons of enlarging experience shaping themselves distinctly and permanently. In the prophecies the religious reason has been awakened ; the faculties which observe and compare and consider and judge, which find problems to

solve and difficulties to explain, the thought which recognises great ideas, and is fired by great principles, begin to occupy themselves with the doings and prospects of men, with the rise and fall of the kingdoms of this world, with the fortunes and hopes of the kingdom of God. The prophets predict ; but even still more, they teach. They draw out and elucidate, and apply the meaning of that moral law which the ancient Church always carried in its bosom. They interpret as they were taught by Him Who inspired them, those wonderful promises of which Israel was so tenacious, and so little imagined the issue. In the prophets we have the first beginnings of what has never failed since, religious teaching ; religion, studied, meditated, reflected on, thought out into principle and inference, explicitly brought to bear on conscience and duty, on the hopes and welfare of society. The great and

characteristic ideas of the Psalms reappear in the prophets ; but in the Psalms they come in devotion addressed to God ; the prophets turn them upon men, expand and develop them in instruction, encouragement, warning, rebuke.

Take, for instance, the development of moral ideas in Ezekiel. He is emphatically the prophet of the moral significance of the Law and of personal responsibility. He is full of the subject in its definite shape. The crimes and transgressions of his people are moral crimes. The tremendous disasters of Israel are the direct result of gross rebellion against the moral law. The burden of his teaching is that the history of nations, whether in Tyre, or Egypt, or Jerusalem, is no chance accident ; that their ruin is the natural and inevitable consequence of their disloyalty to righteousness and truth. He takes up and expands ideas which only show

themselves, as it were, in passing, in the Psalms. The Psalms give warning against the tricks of conscience—"If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me:" "With the clean thou shalt be clean, and with the froward thou wilt show thyself froward." Its self-deceits are lighted up, as with a lightning flash, in that terrible Fiftieth Psalm—"But unto the ungodly said God, Why dost thou preach My laws, and takest My covenant in thy mouth?" "Thou thoughtest wickedly that I am even such a one as thyself." But Ezekiel expands this into an explicit and definite statement, into a doctrine, a generalised rule of the Divine government. The elders of Israel, who came and sat before him are answered—"Therefore speak unto them, and say unto them, Thus saith the Lord God; every man of the house of Israel that setteth up his idols in his heart, and putteth the stumbling-

block of his iniquity before his face, and cometh to the prophet to inquire of him—I the Lord will answer him according to the multitude of his idols.” So, again, in the Psalms no one can doubt what is implied in the words, “Thou rewardest every man according to his work.” No one can doubt the assurance shown of God’s acceptance of repentance. But in Ezekiel the two great doctrines of individual responsibility and of the possibility and efficacy of repentance are expounded at length, and in definite cases and distinct circumstances. “What mean ye that ye use this proverb concerning the land of Israel, The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children’s teeth are set on edge?” “Behold all souls are Mine : as the soul of the father, so also the soul of the son is Mine—the soul that sinneth it shall die.” “As for the wickedness of the wicked, he shall not fall thereby in the day that he

turneth from his wickedness ; neither shall the righteous be able to live for his righteousness in the day that he sinneth." Definitely and consciously, these great beliefs have taken their permanent place in the character of the religious man. His conscience felt them before. He now knows them by thought and reason.

Again, in Isaiah, we see the work finished of moulding the religious character, moulding man into the true and conscious servant of the All Holy, as far as it could be accomplished under the old dispensation. In Isaiah we are so occupied with the greatness and splendour of the message that we sometimes forget, as we do not in Jeremiah and Daniel, what is shown us of the man. I pass by all critical questions about the book ; if there are two parts in it, the spirit and moral portraiture are identical in both. It is full, as no other book of the Old Testa-

ment is, of the magnificence of our human hopes, and of the strange and inconceivable ways in which they were to be secured and fulfilled ; and it is unrolled before us, like the march of some profound and overpowering musical composition, full of all changeful and unexpected movements, strains of sadness and awe interwoven with thrilling joy and piercing tenderness, appeals the most pathetic with bursts of wrath and terror, but all resulting in a whole of incomparable grandeur. But we may also see in it the mirror of the mind of him who was charged with this wonderful disclosure of the counsels and purposes of God. We may see the character, mature and many-sided, of the servant of God, trained by the experience and the traditions of many generations of like-minded men, to the perfect freedom of willing service, to the strength and largeness of heart of an intelligent

obedience. His soul is one with his awful Master ; he has comprehended something of the greatness and the meaning of Him Whose is the world, and before Whom the seraphim veil their faces ; the coal from the altar has touched his lips, and his whole being is aflame with zeal, with sympathy, for the greatest of causes, the cause of the Lord of righteousness and truth. All affections which spring from such whole-hearted loyalty, from such boundless trust, are there : confidence in the hopes of Israel, in the hopes of mankind, dauntless facing of all that evil can do to make the cost of victory dear by suffering ; the wrath of the pure-minded, scorn of human pride, tenderness and compassion going forth to take hold of the humble and meek—“ Comfort ye, comfort ye, My people, saith your God.” In this awful volume, in which thought and imagination were allowed to

master "The vision of the world, and all the wonder that would be," in which he has embodied all that most concerns mankind for the present and the future, and in which the tremendous severity of judgment mingles so strangely with a gracious and inexpressible sweetness which even still takes us by surprise,—through all these public and divinely inspired utterances we may trace, with a fulness and richness and depth unequalled in the Old Testament, the personal lineaments of one who not only by faith and self-discipline, but by thought and knowledge, had become fitted to be a saint of the company of that Redeemer, Whose Person, Whose coming, Whose life of suffering and glory he was given to foretell, and in Whose perfection man was to be made perfect.

So has the wisdom and goodness of God prepared the way to build up among His

creatures a special character, the character of true and deep religion. It was so of old, it is so still. The Psalms are to many of us our daily companions. Week after week and month after month they are the universal language of worship in the whole Christian Church; and if anything is certain in the world, it is that they will still be found the language of worship when *He* comes again. The Prophets still teach, inspire, rebuke us. Nothing in the whole range of poetry, nothing in Greek or Italian art, equals to English minds and feelings the wondrous beauty of those passages of Isaiah, which take soul and ear with their inexplicable charm of thought and melody, which surprise us in hours of joy and trouble and hope with new and unthought-of force of meaning, which haunt our memories with their undying music. And through all this long and varied schooling

—varied in degree and in method, which we trace from Abraham to the prophets, there is one thing common to all its stages, one thing always growing in depth and strength and purity—the passion for righteousness, the hatred of iniquity. O, Christian souls, on whom the ends of the world are come, who inherit the experience, the treasures, the memories of a thousand generations, shall that great passion fade and grow dim out of *our* lives? Shall it burn less brightly and purely in us, possess us more feebly and more doubtfully, now that we have seen the true image of God restored to man and in man, and perfect righteousness fulfilled in Him Who has come to take away the sin of the world, and by the power of His Spirit to make all things new.

IV.

THE MANIFESTATION OF
JESUS CHRIST.

“Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus.”—PHIL. ii. 5.

THE religious character, the character of the servant of God, which was in due time to grow up and blossom into the “mind of Christ,” is shown to us in various stages of its growth in the Old Testament, from the first step of realising God, the faith and self-abandonment of Abraham, and the severe ethical schooling of the law, to the burst of feeling, thought, imagination, affection, which we meet with in the Psalms and Prophets. In depth and reality and

strength of purpose there is no difference to be traced ; the elements which are unfolded at a later stage are implicit, or partially anticipated, in the earlier ; but in fulness and richness of detail, in range of ideas and capacity for expression, in the shaping and heightening and refining of its various elements, we see a development and expansion going on, till we have the character, as it could be reached before our Lord, in the history and words of the prophets. So men learned to pray, to feel, to think, to teach. It was the fruit of the long discipline of the Jewish Church. In the Holy Family ; in the devout shepherds of Bethlehem ; in Zacharias and Elizabeth, "righteous before God, and walking in all the commandments and ordinances blameless ;" in Simeon, "just and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel," and Anna, the prophetess, "serving God with fastings and prayers night and

day," and "speaking to all those who looked for redemption in Jerusalem ;" in the great Baptist himself, in the Twelve, in the "Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile," and in so many others, we see all that this character did, in fitting souls for what Jesus Christ had to teach them. And, on the other hand, in Saul the Pharisee, the "Hebrew of the Hebrews," Saul, "zealous towards God," Saul, "touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless," "living in all good conscience," but hating the name of Jesus, and only thinking of doing God service by persecuting God's saints, we see how far short this character might fall, even in its higher forms, of the "mind of Christ."

But that religious character, hitherto nursed and fostered in the Jewish Church, was to give place to something deeper and yet more perfect. In its higher types, as well as in its shortcomings and perversions

it was to give place, as the flower to the fruit, as childhood to manhood. For the great change, with which all patriarchal and Jewish hope and thought were saturated, without yet knowing all it meant and was to be, came at last. For "the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us," "and was made man"—with man's life to lead, and man's death to die, and if we may venture so to speak of what words are inadequate to express, with human character to raise to its highest purity and power, as the model and standard to His creatures.

No change that ever was, none that could be imagined, was so great as this presence of Jesus Christ among us ; but this greatest of changes came into the world in silence ; outwardly it seemed continuous with the past ; He Who was to make all things new "came down," as the Psalmist had said, "like the rain into a fleece of wool, even as

the drops that water the earth." And as with other things, so was it with this change and elevation of the idea and type of the religious character. Very early in His teaching our Master set before men what in His eyes were its true excellences and its necessary conditions. In the Sermon on the Mount He has drawn in outlines that will endure to the end of time the picture of what in His kingdom is accounted the true and perfect life. He has set His seal and His blessing on the qualities which are its distinguishing features ; He has pointed out its perversions and the mistakes made about it ; He has interpreted what were held to be its laws ; He has pointed out the fatal dangers—outward show and hollow untruth and unreality—which make of religious life a ruin. But He emphatically disclaimed, in this teaching, any break with truths received before. It was the old truth, illuminated,

unfolded, enforced with more solemn sanction and greater authority. "Think not that I am come to destroy the law and the prophets; I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil." The great novelty was that He was in earnest; that He put the real meaning to what others taught and handed down in words. In the Beatitudes were the marks and tokens of the true citizens of that Kingdom of Heaven which He was announcing. But every one of the Beatitudes in substance and spirit, more than one in actual words, had been spoken before by Psalmist or prophet. He seemed to be but carrying on their work; to be but enforcing once more what their hearts and convictions had made them feel to be the truth. He seemed to be only summing up with the authority of a Master who knew all things, and could not be mistaken, what His servants had already declared to a world which could not

be persuaded, and had remained deaf to their witness.

But was this all? Is this enough to satisfy the meaning of that "mind of Christ," which was henceforth to be the aim and the measure of the Christian character? Oh, indeed believe it, that was much, to have the highest righteousness of the Old Testament raised to the completeness of the Sermon on the Mount. That was no mere outward and formal, legal righteousness, which filled the heart of the Psalmists, which spoke and lived in Isaiah and Daniel, which was preached by the great Forerunner who was "filled with the Holy Ghost even from his mother's womb," than whom "no greater had arisen among them that were born of women." That was no artificial or conventional righteousness which passed so naturally into the first words and teaching of Christ, the first and fundamental an-

nouncement of the spirit and ethical character which were to be in His disciples. But, beyond even all this, with Christ there came, there could not but come, something more. The example which He showed was something the world had not yet seen. The work which He came to do was something which the mind of man could not have dared to imagine. The opening of the heavens which came with His ministry on earth, the light which rose with it on the dark questions of human existence, changed the very meaning of human life. How could our life be the same, into which His life had come—in which we had “seen with our eyes and looked upon, and our hands handled,” the Eternal Word? How could things not be new, where “deep called to deep” in the Cross of Jesus Christ, the deeps of human sin and human misery, and the deeps of the love of God.

What do we see? How is the "mind of Jesus Christ" gradually disclosed in the history of His ministry and work? It begins with the same words which describe the Baptist's austere preaching—"Repent, the kingdom of heaven is at hand." He expands, with even more heart-searching thoroughness, the Baptist's call to depth and reality of obedience. The Sermon on the Mount enforces the great lesson of righteousness in language as stern and as unrelenting as any to be found in the Bible. The New Testament, with all its glad tidings of mercy, is a severe book, and it begins its teaching in the most severe form. But the history goes on, and we see the great and awful "Prophet," as He seemed, revealing more and more the most wonderful and unexpected sympathy with men in all that they suffer and all that they need, the most tender compassion for what torments and

bows them down, whether sin or pain ; the most fearless indulgence for the weak and tempted ; the most gracious bounty ; the attractiveness which makes the lowliest and the children come to Him, the loftiness which welcomes the humblest company, and makes Him indifferent to where He lays His head. The Preacher of the Sermon on the Mount takes to Himself the prophetic description—"The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He hath anointed Me to preach the Gospel to the poor, He hath sent Me to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised." And so it was. No one comes near Him without blessing. The leper is not told to stand aloof, but is made whole. The fever in the disciple's household is cured with the touch of His hand. The humble faith of proselytes and

aliens, of the centurion praying for his poor sick servant, of the Syrophenician woman praying for her sick daughter, of the sufferer trying to steal a cure from the hem of His garment, is recognised and blessed. This is what men saw when they followed in His track :—"the blind receive their sight, and the lame walk ; the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear ; the dead are raised up, and the poor have the Gospel preached unto them." Men applied to Him the prophet's words, "Himself took our infirmities and bare our sicknesses." His dwelling, his companionship is with the crowds—the poor, the unknown, and uncared for. But He throws Himself without flinching into the company of all men, not only at the marriage at Cana and the supper at Bethany, but at the feast at the Pharisee's house, or "eating and drinking with publicans and sinners." It is not that the early severity

has disappeared. It is not that the sense of the conflict with evil, with the treacheries and sins of the self-blinded human will, is less keen and persistent. In the moment of mercy and healing and relief the sin that needed pardon as well is not forgotten. It is strange that any one can be blind to the sternness of Jesus Christ. But along with the severity which is never far off—severity to Himself, severity to those whom He chooses and commissions and trusts—"he that taketh not up his cross is not worthy of Me"—severity to all double motives and wavering professions, severity to that wicked hatred of good which refuses to see it when it is as the sun in the heavens—along with his awful severity, which waxes more and more awful as the history moves to its end, there is also close beside it the stream of ineffable and overflowing tenderness—to the little children, to the woman that was a

sinner, to the fainting and hungry multitude, to the despair of the house of Jairus, to the widow following the funeral of her only son, to the sisters of Lazarus His "friend," to the bewildered and heart-stricken disciples of whom He had to take leave. The tenderness deepens as the sternness becomes more terrible ; and terrible as this sternness grows to be, both in language and demeanour, it is this tenderness in its numberless forms and inexhaustible freedom and depth that has stamped its special mark on the story. And at length the end comes : the Last Supper, the Agony in the garden, the great prayer of intercession, "having loved His own, He loved them to the end ;" and then the Judgment-seat, the Cross, the Last Words, words of thought for others in His own extremest need—"Woman, behold thy son," "Father, forgive them," "This day shalt thou be with Me." That is what

men saw, and remembered, and have written down for us, and have burned into the memory of the world. And then they learned who He was Who had so gone in and out among them. They saw Him "declared to be the Son of God with power, by the resurrection from the dead." They found that they had seen, in the conditions of our mortal life, the only-begotten Son of the Father.

Here, then, was given among other things the standard and ideal of the religious character. Hitherto it had attained its highest point, in the Psalms and Prophets, and in the lives of those who had drunk in their spirit; and who can say that that point was not a high one? Who, with the Psalms in his hands, can say that the love of God, the hope of His goodness, the certainty of His kingdom, the humility and resignation of the penitent, are faintly shown

there? But *all* was not there. "I tell you," says our Master, "that many prophets and kings have desired to see those things which ye see, and have not seen them, and to hear those things which ye hear, and have not heard them." "All these having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise, God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect." Jesus Christ had lived and died, and now the whole religious character must take a fresh colour from the great change. Jesus Christ had lived a human life. In much of it it was not possible for man to follow Him; but in much it *was* possible, and it was what He meant His disciples to do. He had taught men more about God and about themselves than the best of them had known before. He had given light, He had brought strength, He had unsealed affections and

appealed to motives beyond the reach even of patriarchs and prophets. Much as there must be essentially in common in the religious character, as we read it in the Old Testament and in the New, we feel that there is a definite and striking difference. New elements have been added to it. It has become a new combination. For now it can have no other model than the life and the mind of the Incarnate Son.

Many things, as is natural, contribute to make this difference. But in the New Testament two great ideas force themselves into new prominence, profoundly affecting religious character: the idea of sin, and the idea of the love of God; the love of God to man, the love of man to God, and to man for God's sake.

No one can fail to see that the idea of sin was greatly deepened by our Lord's coming. The truth about sin was an awful

part of the revelation of Christianity. He came to redeem us from it, to forgive, to heal it; but the measure of its mischief is the Cross; the Passion of the Son of God was needed for its remedy, and not the darkest passages of the Old Testament can so disclose the judgment of God about its malignity. The New Testament opens a new chapter in our thoughts about sin, its mystery, its certainty, its consequences, its deadly haunting and presence, not only in outward acts, but in the secret of thought and imagination and conscience, in the springs of the will—sin, the act of the moral being, the turning away, from truth and good and right and purity, of the real self within a man. In our Lord's earthly life we are shown what sin could do in its many forms to thwart His work; and its power, we know, is in the world still. The consciousness of sin within and around,

the consciousness of what sin really is, the sense of its subtleties, its horrors, the fear of its snares, the necessities of conflict, have struck deep into the religious character of Christians, and they show dark and terrible in contrast with the stainless purity of our Lord. Men are serious when they learn some grave fact about themselves, some fatal unsoundness of constitution, some peril to their happiness. Religious men have had henceforth to take into account their knowledge of this deep disease of their nature, which has come with the greater light of our Lord's presence and holiness.

The spirit which was to be His gift was to "convince the world of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment," to open the eyes of men more widely, and in a way not known before, to the depth and meaning of these tremendous certainties. But a

revelation more wonderful and surprising even than that—for conscience had not been idle in the past generations of mankind—was the counterpart to this dread unveiling. It was the coming of its remedy. It was the idea, in the breadth and dominant greatness in which Christianity presented it, of the love of God. The love of God, the love of God in Christ Jesus, the love of God in His presence among us, in His acceptance of the extremities of our lot, in His infinite compassion and infinite patience, in the tenderness of His inexhaustible sympathy—the love of God in the manger of Bethlehem, the love of God in the awful Passion at Jerusalem—in Jesus Christ dying for the world, in Jesus Christ victorious, in Jesus Christ reigning, in the perpetual Presence, in the ever-inspiring Comforter, in the unceasing Intercession—that was the “glad tidings” which fills the

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New Testament—which is the record of that great change in the religious aspects of life, for which God had been preparing mankind for long years, and which with the fulness of time was now come. “God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son”—“Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends”—“As the Father knoweth Me, even so know I the Father, and I lay down My life for the sheep”—“Having loved His own which were in the world, He loved them to the end”—“The propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only, but for the sins of the whole world”—all these and like wonderful sayings which throng into our memory as the daily food of our souls—what could the utmost revealed to the elder Church, all that faith and hope most relied on then, be, when compared with these? Who

could have spoken then, as it was simply natural and reasonable for Peter and Paul and John to speak—"Lord, Thou knowest that I love Thee;" "Who loved me and gave Himself for me"—"To know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge"—"Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins; . . . and we have known and believed the love that God hath to us. God is love, and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him."

Such a truth, such a faith, could not come into religious life and character without making it different from anything that it could have been before. The great thought of the love of God, familiar as it was to the elder saints, could not but mean much more now than it ever had meant before. Love—love that could not be

doubted—that kept back nothing—that accepted no limit—spoke and revealed itself as it never had done, supreme and paramount, in the words and ministry of Jesus Christ. We must wait till the next world before we can understand to the full the meaning of all that we saw “in the face of Christ Jesus,” of all that we heard of His words, of all that He did among us. But that stupendous appeal to man’s deepest feeling, to his imagination, to his most serious thought and reason, could not but create, in what men did and lived for, something which was new in the world. After Jesus Christ, the soul of religion—I do not say the foundation, or other necessary adjuncts or organs—but the *soul* and energetic principle of religion, could be only love—love with its freedom, its inventiveness, its fearlessness, its generosity, its joy. Obedience to God must take the

shape of love. After such a self-sacrifice, self-sacrifice and self-devotion must become not an occasional heroism, but the natural and habitual mood of the religious soul. The love of God, that love which gave His Son for all the world, broke down at once the barriers of race and polity and religion, all privileges of a chosen seed or an imperial citizenship, all the most deeply rooted distinctions of caste or blood, and made all men brethren, all men one in Jesus Christ, Greek and Jew, Barbarian, Scythian, bond or free—all one, in the unity and in the common hopes of the human race. It gave every man a new interest in all men. It bound all together with the certainty of being equally cared for and thought of, for Jesus Christ had loved all, and died for all. What must sin now be to him who believed that Jesus Christ in His love for men had died for the sins of men; had died, “the

just for the unjust, to bring us unto God?" What were "the sufferings of this present time," what were the utmost that we could win or achieve in it, when men remembered the love and the power of Him Who had come to "seek and to save us," and Who meant us to be "with Him where He is?" The scene of man's great interests was shifted from this familiar world, with its objects, its pleasures, its troubles: there was much to do here still, much to be thankful for, much to hope, much to strive for, much to suffer; but the light had broken upon it from the world above, and had altered all proportions and all perspectives. Was it not reason now to say—"Set your affections on things above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God?" "Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also." Can anything be more natural—could anything be more original and new at

the time—than the pictures of religious character given by the Apostles as the reflections of the mind of Christ and directly connected with what He was and did? “Beloved,” says St. John, speaking of his tremendous theme with almost a child’s simplicity, “if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another.” Or take one of St. Paul’s varied descriptions—so varied, I had almost said so picturesque, so suggestive of what is true and bright and happy and noble in character, breathing the profoundest peace, the strongest moral effort, the most joyful self-surrender to God, all that purity of thought and motive without which man cannot hope to see the face of God in the next world, or to live the life of God in this. Take such a passage as the 12th chapter of the Romans, or the impassioned burst in the First Epistle to the Corinthians on Charity, moving with the rhythmic march of the

loftiest Hebrew Psalm or Greek chorus. Or take the following from one of the central group of Epistles—"Put on, therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, long-suffering, forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any, even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye. And above all these things put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness, and let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which also ye are called in one body ; and be ye thankful. Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by Him ;" and then follows a series

of details about the duties and affections of daily home life. Or these words—which, as we have just heard, lend themselves so beautifully to music¹—“Rejoice in the Lord always ; and again I say, rejoice. Let your moderation be known unto all men. The Lord is at hand. Be careful for nothing ; but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God which passeth all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus”—and then winding up with that magnificent summary of all that can make a man not only holy, but great, not only a saint, but a hero. “Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report ; if there

¹ Farrant's Anthem.

be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things." When had the world heard words so strange, and yet so reasonable?

And thus there has come,—the crown of the long travail of the ages of God's patience, in the only way in which it could come—a form and type of human character, not in idea, but in real life and action, which was a new thing among men, which reflects the thought and temper of Him "Who loved us and gave Himself for us"—built up on the foundation of the old religious character, as it had been developed from the first to the days of John the Baptist, inheriting strength and severity from its almost Puritan strictness—inheriting from it devotion, reverence, and godly fear, its confidence, its thankfulness, its triumphant joy, and all that deep music in the minor key of which the Psalms and Prophets are full; but a new and

mighty spirit had breathed into it—breathed into it from the love and victory of the Passion and the Cross—breathed into it unearthly serenity and sweetness and daring, breathed into it new affections and new hopes. A copy of the “mind of Christ,” it came with new and unthought-of possibilities of goodness. It was no dream, no speculation, no theory on paper or literary picture. It has proved itself by the continuous trial of centuries and by a thousand tests ; by infinitely varied images of mercy, nobleness, self-discipline, self-devotion ; by the martyr’s fortitude and the missionary’s sacrifice ; proved itself in many a patient and suffering life, in many a generous enterprise, in many a holy deathbed, in the blessed peace and innocence of countless homes. “Many prophets and kings have desired to see the things which we see, and have not seen them :” to be able to look back over

such a company of the saints, and with Bishop Andrewes to give God thanks "for their faith, their hope, their labours, their truth, their blood, their zeal, their diligence, their tears, their purity, their beauty." Shall we now be content with a righteousness which does not exceed the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees, which at best goes no further than a form of Jewish obedience? Or must we not feel that in days like ours something more is wanting—something stronger, something more real, to nerve to effort and to endure in trial? My brethren, be of those who have done something to raise the standard of righteousness in the world. Some of you may have noticed the saying quoted the other day of a keen observer who was not a believer—"The advance of society"—he might have said, the "advance of the kingdom of God—depends on the constant exertions of *the*

good man ; when *he* abandons these exertions, it drops back like lead." Do we not need in these perilous times—of which the splendour, and power, and bewildered moral and religious thought remind us at moments of the closing days of the Roman Empire—do we not need to clear our confused fancies, to readjust our standard, to retemper our slack souls, to refresh our hopes, by setting before us the health and directness and simplicity of the religious character, shown in the New Testament. If we are to be happy and at peace, we must face seriously the Apostles' lesson—that in all that men think of one another and themselves, in all they do to one another or for one another, in all they claim from others or yield to others, in the whole intercourse and governance and direction of life, there is for Christians but one true standard and model. "If there is any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love,

if any fellowship of the spirit," if these things are not shadows and self-delusions, then in all that you do or think—"let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, Who being in the form of God thought it not robbery to be equal with God ; but made Himself of no reputation, and took upon Him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men, and being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the Cross."

V.

THE
IMITATION OF JESUS CHRIST.

“And the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch.”
—ACTS xi. 26.

THE Bible puts before us, as a matter of fact, the growth and development of a certain type of human character, which we see to be, more or less perfectly, the reflection of the “mind” of Jesus Christ. Making allowance for the infinite variety among men, the various proportions of qualities, virtues, and defects in individuals, and the difficulty of seizing so subtle and often evanescent a thing as character, yet there is no mistaking a definite outline and type, whether we like it or not. There it is,

a real connected whole, made up of an aggregate of many, and not all of them constant, features, but governed by certain dominant and deeply fixed principles, which make it what it is, and different from other things of the same order. It is described—still more, it *acts* itself out—in the New Testament. It is not an imagination, but a real thing, new at the time in the world. And with the thing, a new word came into the world, *Christian*, something derived from the action, or the teaching, or the following of Christ, which had not been known before : an *ethical* word, denoting a definite combination, qualities not accidentally tied together, but united in an organic and natural connection, like such words as *patriotic*, *statesmanlike*, *philosophic*, or words denoting characteristic national tempers, like *Jewish*, or *Roman*. No one, I suppose, would say that such a definitely marked character did

not appear on the face of the New Testament, and did not give its special interest and importance to that portion of human life which it exhibits. In its own time, there can be no overlooking its reality and significance.

Such a character, such an imitation of Jesus Christ has been shown on the stage of the world. Does it also belong to other times, to modern life, or is it only something that we read of in the New Testament, along with ways and fashions that have long since passed away? This new and singular phenomenon, rising up, as it seemed, out of the earth, amid all the firmly rooted traditions and customs of an age when human institutions seemed to have acquired a solidity unknown before, beneath the majestic and immovable sway of Rome, encompassed by the vast Jewish brotherhood, the competing Oriental religions of Syria, India,

Egypt, Phrygia, the philosophical speculations and debates of the Greek schools, the wisdom, the power, the common sense, the mingled loftiness and brutality of the imperial ruling race—this new “way” of thought and life, carrying the “mind” of the Crucified, His heavenliness, His humbleness, His love, to mart and synagogue and judgment seat, to passenger ship and obscure provincial suburb, to palace and gaol and traveller’s lodging—this strange convinced seriousness, so out of sympathy with all things round it, could it last? Or look at it from the inside—this “conversation” “citizenship, *πολίτευμα*, in heaven,” this “seeking, minding the things above, where Christ is sitting at God’s right hand;” this “life, hidden with Christ in God;” this new key to all things in the world and all things in the human heart, new in phrase as it was new in thought, “the love of God,” “*Caritas Dei*”

—these overpowering and abiding convictions of the inexpressible wonder and hope of human destiny, ending always in the plainest, homeliest, most direct practical precepts for the pure and honest conduct of life—could this be, except in the fervour of¹ a “first love?” Could such a view of the facts and conduct of life as is given in the Epistle to the Ephesians, such “high thinking and plain living,” from the counsels of the highest heavens, down to the proper temper and duty of a nameless slave—could this be a permanent thing in human experience? Was this religious character as we see it in the New Testament, and as it undoubtedly existed then, sufficiently robust to endure the wear and tear of ages? Was it sufficiently deeply rooted, was it in its springs of thought so true and well sustained, in its practical motives so sound and strong,

¹ Rev. ii. 4.

as to face the shocks of unknown, incalculable changes, to withstand the sap and drain of mere novelty? Could it coalesce with man's inevitable business and occupations and influence them? Would it be sufficiently free, versatile, liberal, sympathetic, appreciating the world's great interests, associating itself with what was highest and noblest in them, in duty, in industry, in self-devotion, and in public spirit? Could it adapt itself to the varying ways of East and West, of Greek, or Roman, or German, as well as of Syrian or African; to the altering necessities, the widening knowledge, the new forces and the new tempers it could meet with, in the passage of human society through time? Could it do so without losing its very essence and self? Would it not degenerate and pass into something different at least in substance, even if the same in form? Was it not so, that the beautiful and noble

religious character we see in the Psalms and Prophets passed into the character of the Scribes and Pharisees? Consider what it was, the leading element of its constitution. It was based on the conviction of the relation of the soul to God, Who had thought nothing too great to do or too dear to spare, to do it good. The communion of the soul with God, Who had so loved it, Who so knew it through and through, Who so guarded and strengthened it, this communion was its breath and its food. And then on this, "the first and great commandment," was raised the whole structure of its moral life—in the consciousness of its weakness and sin, of its distance from its ideal, of its need of forgiveness and peace—in the unflinching effort, in spite of all defeats, to come nearer and nearer to its model and pattern, the example of Jesus Christ. His reality, His purity, His compassion, His self-

sacrifice, His strength, His tenderness, His justice, His lowliness—these were all things that men can understand and copy, though so far below their Divine perfectness. So St. Paul tried to copy them, and told his disciples to copy him in this, as he followed Christ. It was a wonderful combination in him. On the one hand, all his deepest and truest affections were really centred on an unseen object—his Master and Redeemer and longed-for Friend and adorable Lord, out of sight. And on the other, in His service and for love of Him, there was all the energy and activity of a most busy, public life, teaching, enlightening, benefitting, his brethren. It was a combination, never seen before, of spiritual with secular virtues—fervent piety, devoutness, reverence, humility, with wide human sympathies, generosity, and strength, and daring; of severe self-command with impassioned freedom; of

high-strung enthusiasm with profound tenderness, and indefatigable benevolence. It was a strange thing in the world. Could it long outlast its own inevitable failures? Could it stand the discouragement of continual defeat, ever trying and never able to reach its lofty standard, and in its best efforts always falling short? Would it have been unnatural for the shrewd observers of the day to ask whether such a combination could be a stable one—whether what to them must have seemed the alliance of an exalted mysticism, the “foolishness” of the Cross, with the heavy and often painful demands of a high morality, could stand the temptations which must meet it on all sides—whether the Christian type was at once stiff enough and elastic enough to meet the storms which awaited it.

The history of the Christian Church has hardly fulfilled the promise of the New

Testament. It has not realised on a large scale the ideal of the New Testament. It has been a very mixed history : on the one hand, great efforts, definite improvement and progress, continuous recovery ; on the other, perplexing disappointment, inconsistency, degeneracy. We have not yet got rid of war ; we still stand face to face with destroying intemperance and shameless vice and the "idolatry" of covetousness. But one thing is certain, the Christian character, which came into being among men from the presence of Jesus Christ has never died out, has never become out of date.

We have had now the experience of eighteen eventful centuries. They can answer the question whether that character, which is a visible fact in the New Testament, has been strong enough to take its place also among the lasting facts of our condition, "on whom the ends of the world

are come"—whether that character is too delicate or too unreal and unsound to stand in the long run the rough usage of the time and change. It was sharply enough tested at the outset. What else, of the influences which we can judge of, produced that change which we call the conversion first of the empire, and then of the races who destroyed it? What, but that passionate effort after real righteousness and goodness, living and working in real men, not in one direction only, but all round; not this or that virtue, but the Christian pattern and spirit, sealed by Christ as a whole? Separate virtues would go wrong by their exaggeration, the austerity and impetuous fervour of the African Church, the jealous care for the faith of the Greeks, the power of counsel and rule and order in the Italians. What told and what lasted was a whole character, above anything local and partial,

reflecting, with whatever imperfections, all that was Christ's—His love and His severity, His meekness and lowliness and His lofty strength, His tenderness and His judgment of evil, His communion with the Father, and His untiring interest in the ways and welfare of men. Time and change have not abolished that type of human character, precarious as its hold might have looked, in the world which it came to leaven. Amid the revolutions and disasters of society, amid sins and apostasies to which the rebellions of Israel and Judah seem light, it has had a charmed life—a life, as we Christians believe, fed and sustained by the ever-present, ever-blessed Spirit; but a life as visible and certain as the life of sense and worldliness. In this “naughty world,” amid its jostling crowds, saint to saint, in high places or low, has handed on the sacred light, the sacred fire, the “mind

of Christ Jesus." Make what qualifications we will, put contrasts and disappointments as forcibly as possible, there it remains from age to age, reflecting the New Testament image, sometimes more strongly, sometimes more dimly, but never ceasing to reflect it, and ever flashing up from time to time in fuller light and more perfect resemblance; reflecting it with all those natural differences which give it freedom and truth without impairing its essential features; reflecting it in all variations of thought and manners, in all sorts and conditions of men, from the king on his throne, an Alfred or St. Louis, statesmen, soldiers, merchants, students of nature and science, down to the lowly maidservant or labourer, whose humble and Christ-like goodness amid pain and sickness so touched and wrought on men round them that the popular love and reverence canonised them

and raised them into the guardian saints of their cities.

We cannot, in our few minutes here, bring before our thoughts the spectacle of that communion and fellowship of all the saints in which the "mind of Christ" from age to age repeated itself. But let us take one or two examples. In this wide expanse we may, as people say, sink shafts. Let us for a moment see in one or two instances how, under the most different conditions, and at long distances of time, the great lineaments of the Christian character reappear.

We know what St. Paul thought it, what it was in him. Running up, as to its source and living spring, to the love of his crucified Master—"Who loved me and gave Himself for me"—it was the devotion of a soul which, full to the highest point of tension, of the thought and longing hope of eternal things, was content for the sake of

the Master and of those whom the Master loved, with the rudest tasks and humblest duties of earth, with a life of daily self-denial, "daily dying," he calls it, that he might help his brethren, and live a good life, brave, generous, pure, good in the sight of God, and good to men. "For the love of Christ constraineth us," he writes, "because we thus judge, that if One died for all, then were all dead. And that He died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto Him which died for them, and rose again." Therefore, he says, "we labour, that, whether present or absent, we may be accepted of Him." He likens his life to an offering which he pours forth with gladness for the benefit of his friends. "Yea, if I be offered upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I joy and rejoice with you all." And the practical issue of all this high-

raised view of life is the most careful and exact attention to the duties, the rules, the disciplined tempers of ordinary life.

Let us pass by the age of the martyrs, the age of the Fathers, the age of the ascetics, the age of the missionaries—those forgotten saints of forgotten Churches, who went forth for the love of Christ among the barbarian settlers in France, in Germany, in Switzerland, to convert them and to teach them the arts of civil life, and whose memory is preserved, as far as most of us have ever heard anything of them, only in the name of some town on a Swiss lake or German river, some mountain pass, or obscure village, or secularised monastery. Let us come down to a time somewhere about half-way between St. Paul's days and our own. Let us take as instances of what was to be seen then, what belongs to those days, a man, and a book. Let us take a

man who, strangely different and in some ways even repellent to us, yet commands the interest of all who look into his history, so heroic was he, so simple, so pure and deep in his charity for men—St. Francis of Assisi—who, when all round him was sunk in worldliness and selfishness, rose up and with princely heart, as the great poet says, claimed as his spouse the poverty of Jesus Christ ; whose love, kindled by the love of the Crucified, overflowed over the souls of men, to all that the Crucified had made, beasts of the fields and birds of the air—in his “Song of the Creatures,” with his un-resting fancy fired by that love, claiming kinship and brotherhood with all things created—the sun, the moon, the wind, the fire, even with “sister Death :” who, giving up all for Christ, set himself as the business of his life to share and understand the lot of the poor, the weak, the wretched ; to dignify

their condition, to comfort them with his boundless sympathy. With all that was of the time and local, with all that was mistaken and ignorant and superstitious, with all that was extravagant and grotesque, in spite of all the wild things said of him by foolish or selfish disciples, there was the reality of a life devoted to Christ :—

“Go,” was his word to his companions, “Go, proclaim peace to men ; preach repentance for the forgiveness of sins. Be patient in tribulation, watchful in prayer, strong in labour, moderate in speech, grave in conversation, thankful for benefits.” “They were not to shut themselves up,” says his recent English biographer, “or to care first for their own salvation.” “He had thought little of himself, even of his soul to be saved, all his life. The trouble on his mind had been what to do—how sufficiently to work for God and to help men. . . . For himself and for his brethren, he desired active service and living influence on men. He was out of the world, and yet he would not be taken out of the world.”¹

Would not St. Paul have hailed him as

¹ Mrs. Oliphant, *Francis of Assisi*, pp. 63, 67.

indeed "like-minded?" Here, half way down the centuries, "the mind of Christ" is realised in a *man*; again, it speaks in different and yet not discordant tones, in a *book* which was also characteristic of its time, the *Imitation of Christ*. No one, though we are familiar with the name of Thomas à Kempis, knows for certain its origin and author: it springs forth out of the depths of the heart, no one can tell exactly whence, and by degrees takes its last and present shape. And, except the New Testament, no book of religious thought has been used so widely or so long:—"2000 Latin editions, 1000 French; sixty French translations, thirty Italian," a considerable number of English ones; and we are retranslating still. Among its translators and editors have been such different men as Corneille, Wesley, Lamennais. No book of human composition has been the companion of so many serious

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hours, has been so prized in widely differing religious communions, has nerved and comforted so many and such different minds—preacher and soldier and solitary thinker, Christian or even, it may be, one unable to believe. And what is its secret? Is it not that it has been found to be a true and deep commentary on its own opening words:—

“He that followeth Me walketh not in darkness,” saith the Lord. These are the words of Christ, by which we are taught that we must copy His life and His ways, if we would be really enlightened, and delivered from all blindness of heart. Let it, then, be our chief study to meditate on the life of Jesus Christ. The teaching of Jesus Christ excels all the teachings of the saints; and whosoever hath His Spirit shall find there the “hidden manna.” But whoever would fully and in his heart understand the words of Christ must try to conform his whole life to Christ’s pattern. . . . Verily, deep words make not the saint or the righteous man; but a good life makes a man dear to God. . . . On two wings is a man lifted up above earthly things: on simplicity and on purity; simplicity in purpose, purity in affection. Simplicity

has God for its end, purity takes hold of Him and tastes Him. No good action will ever perplex you, if you be free within from unregulated affection ; if you mean and seek nothing but God's good pleasure and the good of your neighbour you shall have the delight of perfect liberty. If thine heart were right, then would every creature be to thee a mirror of life and a book of holy teaching ; there is no creature so small and mean but can image forth the goodness of God. If thou art good and pure within, then shouldest thou see all things without perplexity and well take them in. The pure heart penetrates heaven and hell. . . . If there is joy in the world, surely it belongs to the man of pure heart. . . . Jesus hath now many lovers of His heavenly kingdom, but few bearers of His Cross. . . . Many follow Jesus to the Breaking of the Bread, but few to the drinking of the Cup of the Passion. . . . But there is no salvation of the soul, nor hope of everlasting life but in the Cross. Take up, therefore, thy cross and follow Jesus. He went before, bearing His Cross, that thou mightest also bear thy cross and desire to die with Him. . . . Go where thou wilt, seek whatsoever thou wilt, thou shalt not find a higher way above, nor a safer way below, than the way of the Holy Cross. . . . Set thyself, therefore, as a good and faithful servant of Christ to bear manfully the

Cross of thy Lord, crucified for thee of His love. . . . When thou hast reached to this, that trouble is sweet to thee for Christ's sake, then believe that it is well with thee: for then thou hast found paradise on earth. . . . If there had been anything better and more available for man's salvation than to suffer, surely Christ would have shown it by word or example.

Had not the writer caught what St. Paul meant when he said, "God forbid that I should glory, save in the Cross of Jesus Christ our Lord?" The tradition was not lost of what he conceived of one great side, at least, of the Christian character, of the image of the "mind of Christ."

Then, once more, let us come down to times more like our own; to a teacher whose name and words are familiar to us Englishmen—a life, lived under conditions not so very different from our own in our own land, thinking our thoughts and speaking our mother tongue. Bishop Thomas Wilson is a great name in modern religious

history. Even fifty years ago his books were favourite devotional reading with religious people ; but he belongs to the days of grave piety and subdued enthusiasm, and distrust of all that is showy, or venturesome, or romantic in religion. There is nothing in him but what is plain, direct, homely, for the most part prosaic ; all is sober, unstrained, rational, severely chastened in style and language. But with all this difference of dress and outward aspect, all the differences of customary phrase and habitual associations, that special religious character which first appears in the New Testament shows itself in him and his writings in undiminished strength :—

“ True devotion,” he begins his *Sacra Privata*, “ consists in having our hearts always devoted to God, as the sole fountain of all happiness ; and Who is ready to hear and to help His otherwise helpless, miserable creatures. It is to be obtained—1. By earnest prayer—‘ He that hungers after righteousness

shall certainly be filled ;' 2. By possessing our hearts with a deep sense of our own misery and want and danger : this is the grace of humility ; 3. By considering God's goodness, power, and readiness to help us : this is called faith in God ; 4. By convincing our hearts of the vanity of everything else to afford us any real comfort or help : this is to be effected by self-denial. . . . In order to dispose our hearts to devotion, the active life is to be preferred to the contemplative. To be doing good to mankind disposes the soul most powerfully to devotion."

And this religion, sober and understated as it is, flows from the love of the Crucified :—

"O Jesus, the only refuge of sinners, does the world know what it is to die in sin?" . . . "I acknowledge, O Jesus, the almighty power of Thy grace, to heal all the disorders of my soul. . . . O Jesus, give me an inward disposition to holiness, a humble and contrite heart, a dependence on the will of God, an acknowledgment of His goodness, and a zeal for His glory ; to which all the ordinances of the law and Gospel should lead us. . . . Where shall we take our pattern but from Thee? O Thou fountain and pattern of love, grant that I may love Thee above all things, and my neighbour as myself."¹

¹ *Sacra Privata*, Oxford, 1838, pp. 1, 2, 274, 278.

Was not this to understand, to realise, to fulfil the "mind of Christ?" As he wrote so he lived, simply, resolutely, with single and dauntless heart; "a burning and shining light"—"burning, indeed, and shining," as has been said, "like the Baptist in an evil time, he seemed as if a beacon lighted on his small island, to show what his Lord and Saviour could do in spite of man, how He could at will make for Himself a dwelling-place upon the waves and a garden in the barren sea." ¹

What is it that gives to these examples their typical character? If human words can express a dominant idea, a settled purpose and fixed habit of mind, definite ways of thinking and principles of action, a permanent mode of viewing all things round, these words do. They reveal a character; a solid, substantial thing, spontaneous, en-

¹ Preface to *Sacra Privata*, Oxford, 1838, signed I.H.N.

ergetic, well marked. They breathe the very soul of reality—they come from all that the man is, and wills. What is it that makes the likeness among them, in spite of the widest differences? What is that one note that sounds through them all, one and the same in different parts of the scale and on different instruments? What was it that all these men felt so deeply in common, though so far apart in time and all circumstances of customs and language and place—Paul, the wandering tent-maker, the Jewish Rabbi, the Apostle, who had seen the ascended Lord, and heard His voice; Francis, with his wild imagination, his playfulness and extravagance, and the rope girdle round his rough frock; Bishop Wilson, with the stiff fashions and straitlaced decorum, and formal reserved dryness of the last century? What was it that exalted that which was the ruling and shaping power of *their* real inner

self, above all that was best and greatest in what we have seen to be the *preparatory* stages of the discipline of character—the faith of Abraham, the sternness of the law, the joy and penitence of the Psalms, the deep moral convictions and vivid insight of the Prophets, the sanctity of John the Baptist, much more the stately and lofty ethics, the moral seriousness of Epictetus and Marcus Aurelius? It is expressed in the words of our Lord Himself, “God so loved the world”—in the words of His Apostle—“who loved me and gave Himself for me.” It was that new, and yet old “commandment,” new in time, older than the worlds—the love of God in Jesus Christ—*Caritas Dei*—man dear to God, God in Jesus Christ the Crucified, dear, most dear to man, his hope, his refuge, his most precious possession—the love of such a one as God is, to man whose heart can answer to it. It was this sense of

the wondrous bond between God and the soul of man, such as it had longed for and never found till now. It was the tenderness spread through the whole character, by the "love of God shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost, given unto us," and yet strengthening its strength, nerving its earnestness, enforcing duty, widening its sympathies and sense of brotherhood, refining its manliness—nay, guarding and sharpening the keenness of its severity. As long as men believe in Christ this will last: it will not last longer. But the strong, tenacious fibre of Christian character has not yet failed. The serious love of the unseen Christ, a great sentiment, and the highest of all affections, raised to the power of a master principle of life, has not yet died out. It still wields its power over the wills of men. By God's mercy, God be thanked, it has yet great things to do. It has asked and re-

ceived the sacrifice of richly equipped and noble lives ; it still asks and receives the sacrifice of lives that might have been spent amid all that modern life can most innocently give, to the hard and distasteful tasks for which modern life also so urgently calls ; it may be, that last sacrifice that man can offer —“greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.” This—this “charity that never shall fail”—this is the finish and crown of the religious character, as it was new-created in Christ, as it can be on earth. This, while we are here in the flesh, is to have the “mind of Christ.”

THE END.

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